



Wisconsin Bear Hunters' Association, Inc.

TESTIMONY of WBHA Board Member Al Lobner on SB 222

May 28, 2009

The Wisconsin Bear Hunters' Association would like to go on record as supporting Senate Bill 222, and all its provisions.

Most of our members, myself included, participate in group bear hunting. I think most of our members probably participate in group deer hunting as well. We understand how it works in practice. Apparently so does Senator Decker, because this bill will make official what is in fact the unofficial way in which most Wisconsin deer hunters group hunt.

It would be very silly for wardens to be wasting their time wondering about whether the shooter was "in contact" with the hunter who tags the deer. During drives and other hunting practices, it is very common for one hunter to be separated by several hundred yards from another member of the group. Is the intent of the law really that the shooter should ring his friend on the cell phone before he takes the shot? I don't think so.

We also wholeheartedly support the provision of this bill dealing with gun cases. What possible safety issue are we addressing by saying my unloaded gun sitting on the hood of my car, parked in a farm field, is in violation of the law?

Hunters I have hosted from other states are amazed to find out about our current gun case law and even MORE amazed to find out that it is actually enforced.

Recently, a friend of mine had his car stolen out of his driveway. In that car was an unloaded, but uncased firearm. Police recovered both the car and the firearm quickly, but one officer tried to make the victim into the criminal, by threatening a gun case violation. Fortunately common sense prevailed.

That is what the WBHA is asking of this committee today. Let common sense prevail. Please support SB 222.

For more information please contact our representative: Bob Welch – 608-819-0150.

Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

Testimony of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation Regarding Senate Bill 222

Chair Holperin, members of the Senate Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and the 168 hunting, fishing and trapping groups that it represents. Those groups represent over 100,000 hunters, anglers and trappers in the state. We have also been specifically been asked to testify on behalf of the Wisconsin Bow Hunters Association and their members who are directly impacted by Senate Bill 222 and cannot be here today because of the extremely short notice afforded for this hearing.

The Federation has great concerns about Senate Bill 222 as it is drafted. Those concerns are both as to the process being used regarding the passage of this bill and about the substance of the bill. We are hopeful that the bill has just been drafted incorrectly and that the public process being used will be modified to make sure that the voices of the hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin hunters impacted by this bill will be heard. In addition, we are hopeful that the likely concerns of state and local law enforcement officers toward the consequences of this legislation are also fully addressed.

First as to process. The hearing on Senate Bill 222 was scheduled with less than 40 hours notice to Wisconsin sportsmen and women. We know of many sportsmen and women that have concerns about the ramifications of this bill and would have been here today to voice their concerns but they could not get off of work on such short notice. In addition, the actual bill itself was placed on the Legislative website barely more than 24 hours before this hearing. The issues that are addressed in this bill are not emergencies and adequate notice of the hearing and adequate time for review of the actual legislation by hunters and law enforcement officers should be afforded.

Secondly, the topics of this bill which include possession and transportation of firearms in vehicles and group hunting are practices that affect hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin hunters every year. This state has wisely established a nationally unique sixty-year old system to gather the input of sportsmen and women before major regulations affecting their hunting practices are passed into law and that is the Spring Hearing process of the Conservation Congress. The issues that are before you today have not gone through that process and Wisconsin sportsmen and women have not had a fair chance to weigh in with their views on this issue.

As far as the substance of the legislation as drafted, the changes being proposed are of great concern because of the potential for increased firearm accidents, the increased

potential for poaching and the increased threat to local and state law enforcement officers.

First, as drafted, the bill would allow the possession and transportation of uncased firearms in moving vehicles anywhere in the state, road or off-road, rural or urban. While under the bill these firearms cannot be loaded in a moving vehicle, it takes fractions of a second or seconds at most to unload most firearms. This provision, as drafted, presents major firearm safety, public safety and law enforcement safety issues. It would also make it very difficult to enforce state regulations prohibiting the poaching of wildlife.

Secondly, as drafted, the bill would legalize the possession of loaded firearms in stationary vehicles anywhere in the state, road or off-road, rural or urban. Once again this will result in increased firearm safety, public safety and law enforcement safety concerns. It will also make it very easy for someone in a vehicle to travel anywhere with a loaded, uncased firearm. If stopped, all the individual would have to claim is that the weapon was loaded once the vehicle was stationary. Once again, the allowance of loaded firearms in vehicles would make it very difficult to enforce state regulations prohibiting the poaching of wildlife.

This legislation also changes the laws regarding group bagging during the gun deer season. Right now an individual can shoot a deer for another member of their hunting party if they are in direct contact with the other person, the other person has the appropriate deer tag and that individual immediately tags the deer. Under this bill, the second person would not have to even be in the field with the hunting party of the first person, as long as they can drive to the deer and tag the deer within an hour. Also it increases substantially the amount of time a conservation warden takes to investigate an incident with an untagged deer in the woods. The way this bill is drafted, a warden upon finding an untagged deer in the field may have to wait an hour for an individual to come up and tag the deer. Our conservation law enforcement staff is spread too thin to impose this additional burden on the investigation of a potential illegal hunting situation.

Also for the first time, this bill would extend group bagging to archery hunting. Bow hunting is a solitary sport, generally not practiced as a group hunting activity. Historically Wisconsin bow hunters and the Wisconsin Bow Hunters Association has strongly opposed the extension of group bagging to the archery season. This issue has not been put forward to bow hunters through the Conservation Congress spring hearing process and the Wisconsin Bow Hunters Association was not approached regarding this legislation.

In conclusion, the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation respectfully requests that the Committee not approve this bill and that its provisions not be placed into the state budget bill as it advances. Rather we request that those most affected by this bill have an opportunity to voice their opinions on this bill. We recommend that these issues be brought to Wisconsin hunters through the Conservation Congress spring hearing process. State and local law enforcement agencies should also be asked for their advice on this matter and the Wisconsin Bow Hunters Association and its members should be consulted on the archery group bagging provisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 222.

Submitted by:
George Meyer
Executive Director

May 28, 2009